

Cable
Text:

C O N F I D E N T I A L NICOSIA 00291

SIPDIS

CX:

ACTION: POL

INFO: DAO TSR MGT PA FCS RAO AMB DCM ECON PMA CONS

DISSEMINATION: POLX /1

CHARGE: PROG

VZCZCAYO853

PP RUEHAK

DE RUEHNC #0291/01 0491516

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 181516Z FEB 05

FM AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3494

INFO RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4095

RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 3072

RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0622

RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 6039

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0866

RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2061

RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0518

RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 0844

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0184

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 NICOSIA 000291

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/17/2014

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CY](#) [TU](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#)

SUBJECT: CIVILIAN-MILITARY RELATIONS IN NORTH CYPRUS:

LIVING WITH AN 800-POUND GORILLA

REF: A. 03 NICOSIA 2373 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. 03 USDAO NICOSIA IIR 6823001804 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)C. NICOSIA 221

[1](#)D. NICOSIA 223

[1](#)E. 04 NICOSIA 1916

Classified By: Ambassador M. Klosson, for reasons 1.4, b & d.

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. With roughly 25,000 troops in Cyprus and a history of interference in Turkish Cypriot politics, the Turkish military exercised considerable sway in many spheres of civilian life in the north. The army has kept a low profile, however, since the 2003 elections that brought the pro-settlement "government" of Mehmet Ali Talat to power. But the Turkish army remains influential thanks to its prestige, direct control over local security forces, and role in the economy. Military sensitivity about its core policy equities -- control of overall security and of the Green Line -- constrain the civilian leadership's room to maneuver. As a result, the Talat administration is sometimes unable to move ahead with policy measures opposed by the army, even if these steps are in the interest of the Turkish Cypriot community. Future settlement talks will undoubtedly require difficult concessions from the Turkish side beyond those foreseen in the Annan Plan, and may reveal some differences between Turkish Cypriots and Ankara. END SUMMARY.

A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

[1](#)2. (C) Over the years, often with "President" Rauf Denktash's active encouragement, the Turkish army has played a prominent role in north Cyprus. Since the 2003 elections that brought the pro-settlement CTP of Talat to power, the military has

loosened its grip on local politics and allowed a more open dialogue over most questions of governance. But in the words of one academic, the Turkish army remains a "800-pound gorilla" with which the locals must cohabitate.

13. (C) The army's influence is due in no small part to the sheer size of the Turkish garrison here, which is especially large compared to the local population. Turkey keeps all information that might reveal the exact number and composition of these forces under wraps; OSCE and CFE requirements do not oblige Turkey to report its troop strength on Cyprus. But UNFICYP and USDAO estimate the force consists of two mechanized infantry divisions totaling 25,000 men (plus roughly 3,000 dependent family members). This means there is more than one Turkish soldier for every ten civilians in north Cyprus.

14. (C) The Turkish military's power is augmented by its control over all Turkish Cypriot security forces. Under a "temporary emergency" provision of Turkish Cypriot "law," the Turkish Cypriot security forces are under the direct command of a 2-star Turkish general. The 3000-5000-man Turkish Cypriot military is completely integrated into Turkey's "Peace Forces," and the civilian authorities have no operational control over these units. The 2000-strong police force is also directly subordinate to the Turkish army under this arrangement.

THE MOST RESPECTED INSTITUTION

15. (SBU) The average Turkish Cypriot has positive feelings toward the Turkish military. According to pollster Muharrem Faiz, 88 percent of the people in north Cyprus say the army is the "most trusted" institution on the island -- a figure that dwarfs the consistently low popularity of politicians and "TRNC government" institutions. These feelings are rooted in the Turkish Cypriot community's historical experience; they remind anyone who is willing to listen of the violent oppression they suffered at the hands of the Greek Cypriot majority prior to the 1974 "Peace Operation," and even left-wingers only grudgingly admit that the Turkish army's treatment of Greek Cypriots during the invasion may have been less than humane.

16. (SBU) With such prestige, the military can essentially ignore criticism from the locals. Turkish Cypriot merchants, for example, routinely complain about cut-rate competition from duty-free PX stores to no avail. Neither have they managed to convince the army to procure more than a small amount of foodstuff on the local economy. The army, which uses over ten percent of all electricity produced by the rickety "TRNC" power company, has often been lax in payment of its utility bills -- drawing only muted protests from Turkish Cypriot leaders.

17. (C) Even pro-solution figures such as "PM" Talat, who privately concede that the presence of the Turkish army is an obstacle to any settlement agreement with the Greek Cypriots, are hesitant to criticize it in public. With the exception of the outspoken Mustafa Akinci and his former BDH allies, Izzet Izcan and Huseyin Angolemlı, no Turkish Cypriot politician is willing to call openly for the removal of Turkish troops -- partly for fear of antagonizing Ankara, and partly for fear of alienating voters.

THROWING ITS WEIGHT AROUND

18. (SBU) The military's uncontested moral authority, to say nothing of its size and strength, has allowed it to exercise a powerful role in Turkish Cypriot politics since before Cyprus independence. Throughout the 50s and 60s, the Turkish military supplied TMT paramilitary forces with weapons and support, and had corresponding influence on the selection of Turkish Cypriot leaders. According to local lore Rauf Denktash, who shoved former Cyprus VP Fazıl Küçük aside in the late 1960s, became leader of the Turkish Cypriot

community with the consent and encouragement of the TGS. From the invasion of 1974, through the declaration of the "TRNC" in 1983, to the most recent elections in 2003, political developments in north Cyprus have all taken place under the watchful eye of Turkish troops.

¶9. (C) Turkish priorities during that 30-year period were to consolidate their control over north Cyprus, forcing the Greek Cypriots to accept the "TRNC" as a fait accompli. After 1974, the army facilitated the resettlement of mainland Turks to Cyprus, doled out contracts to sympathetic local businessmen, pressured opposition politicians, and supported a long string of hard-line governments under Rauf Denktash. This support was not a one-way street; USDAO notes that Turkish force commanders regularly get promoted after their service in Cyprus. It is believed that Denktash has used his deep state connections to reward Turkish generals who were helpful to him during their tours on the island.

¶10. (C) As recently as the parliamentary elections of 2003, the Turkish army (refs A and B) openly intervened on behalf of the nationalist UBP of Dervis Eroglu and the DP of Serdar Denktash, Rauf's son. Reports of vote buying, logistical support to the parties, and open campaigning by Turkish officers were credible and widespread. One local businessman, who had a long-standing contract to supply sugar to the army, told us the military suddenly stopped buying from him when he started campaigning for a pro-settlement party in 2003. Rumors persist that there is a military "blacklist" of companies whose bad politics prevent them from getting contracts from the army. In 2003, the army also brought charges against several Kibris newspaper writers for "defaming and insulting the military" and began proceedings against them in a military court.

¶11. (C) Yet after the emergence of the pro-solution administration of "PM" Talat in January 2004, the Turkish military toned down its role in politics. The army broke ranks with Denktash and, perhaps going against the better judgment of many of its own officers, stayed out of the April 2004 Annan Plan referendum, allowing an overwhelming "yes" vote. It suspended its charges against the Kibris journalists, and allowed the "TRNC" to repeal the law which allowed military courts to try civilians for political offenses.

¶12. (C) There have been very few reports of military interference in this month's parliamentary elections (refs C and D). During his January visit to the island, Turkish Land Forces Commander Buyukanit made a careful point of meeting with leaders from both left and right. A close advisor to the DP's Serdar Denktash told us that Buyukanit carried a clear message from the TGS, which he delivered privately to each party leader: the army would keep its nose out of local politics.

¶13. (C) Speculation abounds as to why the army is keeping such a low profile. One journalist suggested that TGS Chief Ozkok has succeeded in forcing a more "European" outlook on the military. Other observers simply believe that the army has decided to go along (for now, at least) with the AKP government's goals of a Cyprus settlement and EU membership. In the absence of military intervention, a more open, pluralistic political atmosphere is developing in north Cyprus.

THE LIMITS OF TURKISH CYPRIOT PEOPLE POWER: KEY ARMY EQUITIES

¶14. (C) But Turkish Cypriots know there are limitations to their newfound political liberty. In a recent meeting with the Ambassador, Talat privately admitted that his room for maneuver was very limited. He noted that although he was allowed autonomy in matters of "administration," at the end of the day the army could still "control everything."

¶15. (C) The military has a clear hierarchy of interests. As Talat alluded, the generals pay little attention to most

day-to-day governance issues, including the budget, education, economic development and the like. The military's paramount concern is to retain control over north Cyprus security, including final authority over security along the Buffer Zone and continued command over local security forces.

Cognizant of -- and frustrated by -- the military's red lines, Turkish Cypriot civilian leaders are often unable to advance policy initiatives they feel would be to the benefit of their community. For example:

-- Proposals to bring the police under civilian leadership, while privately supported by almost all political leaders including Talat and Serdar Denktash, are generally considered too "radical" to be advocated openly. The BDH is the only one of the major parties to include an open call "civilianization" of the police in its party platform.

-- Despite a Turkish Cypriot willingness to proceed with the opening of additional Green Line checkpoints for civilian crossings, military footdragging on demining and police staffing has caused delays and limited the civilian leadership's flexibility on when and where additional crossings can be opened.

-- According to Talat and other observers, the Turkish army has been historically "timid" about its cooperation with the Committee for Missing Persons, a three-member body set up by the UN to investigate the fate of people missing since the violence of 1963-74. Talat seems genuinely interested in advancing this "human rights issue," but can move no faster than the military is willing to go. While he says the Turkish army has become more forthcoming about information relating to possible mass grave sites in the north, the CMP's work has yet to bear fruit; one suspected grave proved empty when excavated last month.

¶16. (C) Another telling example relates to procedures regulating Green Line crossing by U.S. Embassy FSNs. In a recent and highly arbitrary change of practice, the Turkish Cypriot police began requiring our Greek Cypriot staff to show extra forms of identification and fill out "visa" forms when crossing north on Embassy business. Although Turkish Cypriot civilian authorities (up to and including Talat, "FM" Serdar Denktash, and the "Minister of the Interior") have promised to rectify the situation by issuing new orders governing police procedure, the officers at the checkpoint continue to harass our FSNs. An "MFA" official privately intimated that although the civilian authorities can cajole the police, the cops would not change even their simplest procedures -- especially relating to the Green Line -- without explicit direction from the military. Our communications with the Turkish Embassy on this matter have so far been unsuccessful.

¶17. (C) What's more, top army brass occasionally lay down public markers with regard to the Cyprus question. General Buyukanit's January public declaration that "not one Turkish soldier" would leave the island without a settlement has generally been interpreted by Talat's people as a good-cop-bad-cop message to the Greek Cypriots. Nonetheless, statements such as this render it virtually impossible for any Turkish Cypriot civilian leader even to discuss confidence-building measures involving a drawdown of troops, the hand-over of Varosha, or other such steps that might be to their tactical advantage in the future.

COMMENT

¶18. (C) In spite of its reflex suspicion of Talat's ex-communist CTP, the Turkish army has left his "government" largely alone. It stood out of the way and allowed him to take power, did not block the community's firm endorsement of the Annan Plan, has not voiced opposition to the new law that could eventually lead to the deportation of illegal Turkish settlers (ref E), and seems willing to let the current elections unfold without interference. Nonetheless, Turkish Cypriots know the army retains the ability to run the show

should events unfold in a way contrary to the military's interest.

¶19. (C) If settlement talks restart in earnest, it is almost certain the Turkish Cypriot side will need to make concessions beyond what was provided for in the Annan Plan. How much would the army allow to ensure Greek Cypriot acceptance of a future settlement plan? Would the generals agree to withdraw all their troops from Cyprus or abandon the right of intervention? Would they allow the deportation of significant numbers of Turkish settlers?

¶20. (C) These questions will not be decided in Cyprus. USDAO notes the army here strictly adheres to orders from the mainland; local commanders must get approval from Ankara to meet with even working-level counterparts, and are unlikely to show any initiative on their own. Turkish Cypriots will continue to study how relations between AKP and the TGS evolve -- and will need firm signals from both that the military is on board before they offer further concessions for a settlement. END COMMENT.
KLOSSON